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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

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Thesis

NATURE IN THE WORKS OF CHAUCER

Submitted by

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(A. B., Boston University, 1929)

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Nature in the Works of Chaucer.

I

Introduction

Many of the earlier and more Modern English poets have been studied with reference to their treatment of nature. Shakespeare, Milton, the school of "graveyard poets", Burns, Blake, and especially Wordsworth with the other Romanticists have been more fully treated. Chaucer, while he is spoken of as being a poet of nature, has not been thoroughly examined in regard to his treatment of this element of poetry. When one reads his works even superficially and merely for the pleasure which the reading gives in itself, he is impressed by the fact that here is a poet who sings of those external things which make the world about us. "It is the outer world in its most concrete forms and objects, with which he delights to interweave his poetry--scenes of South England, the oaks and other forest trees, the green meadows, quiet fields and comfortable farms, as well as the great castles where nobles dwelt."[1]

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[1] On Poetic Interpretation of Chaucer, by John Campbell Shairp, p. 171.

We find the same sentiment expressed by our own American poet, Longfellow:

"He is the poet of the dawn, who wrote
The Canterbury Tales and his old age
Made beautiful with song, and as I read
I hear the crowing cock, I hear the note
Of lark and linnet and from every page[1]
Rise odors of ploughed fields or flowery mead."

That Chaucer was above all else a teller of tales cannot be denied. It is not his translations of the "Romaunt of the Rose" or of "Boethius de Consolatione Philosophie", not his minor poems which make Chaucer immortal in the field of literature, It is his "Canterbury Tales" for which he is most widely known and appreciated. His power of understanding and portraying the universal qualities of man in his varied positions in life has won him the regard of readers from his age to the twentieth century. Nevertheless, his treatment of nature is one of the important elements in his works. It is for this reason that it is of great interest to examine Chaucer's works to discover the basis of our impressions of him as a poet of nature.

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[1] Chaucer, by Henry W. Longfellow, lines 9-14.

First we must ask ourselves with what kind of nature did the poet deal? Was it the nature of his own England? Was he adopting merely the thoughts of other authors or was he giving pictures from his own observations? These questions must be considered before we can form a proper estimate of this element of his poetry.

Next we must try to discover his method of treatment. Is it reflective? Is it descriptive? Is it scientific? Does he use figures of speech? Does he employ classical allusions? These and other questions rise before us when we consider the problem.

There is but one way to obtain an answer to these questions. This is by an examination of the poet's works in great detail. The works must be read with the attention fixed upon the subject to be considered. Each poem should be studied to discover any mention of animals or growing things. When the evidence has been placed before the reader, he may then begin to regard the question of how the subject is treated. Finally to reach any conclusions and generalizations concerning Chaucer's treatment of nature we must consider each poem separately as a single entity and the complete works as a whole.

A careful search rewards one with only the most meager of bibliographies upon the problem. Although Chaucer has been treated very fully as a subject for the research of scholars through many years, his use of nature has been neglected to a great extent. Scources, historical allusions, biographical material, textual subjects, questions of pronunciation, and his characters have been discussed through years of investigation and detailed study. Thus we find ourselves to be explorers in fresh fields. For this reason we must use the text itself as the basis upon which this thesis is to be written. Very few opinions and ideas can be drawn from the works of earlier and more learned writers. Those who have discussed the works of Chaucer as a whole have given but a cursory examination of the subject of nature, offering merely the superficial impressions which were gained from a reading of his poems with other topics more prominently in mind. Books which deal with nature in the whole field of English poetry have, likewise, either entirely neglected the works of Chaucer or have merely skimmed the subject most hastily and with no degree of thoroughness or deep insight. Mr. Stedman has even gone so far as to question the value of descriptive poetry which in the following pages we wish to show is one of the glories. of Chaucer's poetry.

He says, "What is called descriptive poetry never can be very satisfying since the painter is so much more capable than the poet of transferring the visible effects of nature, those addressed to the eye."[1]

Because of this lack of material to be consulted the following pages must, of necessity, be chiefly the result of original research in the works of Chaucer themselves. We must, therefore, make extensive use of quotations from the poems for the purpose of showing the kinds of nature which the poet has used in creating the atmosphere and settings for his inimitable tales.

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1 The Nature and Element of Poetry, by Edmund C. Stedman, p. 202.

II

The Kinds of Nature Treated.

A. Conventionalized Nature.

To believe that Chaucer's nature descriptions were entirely the unconscious outpourings of the rapt lover of nature would be false. We find that the poet was influenced by both the French and Italian writers[1] of the time. It was only natural that conventionalism and classicism should become prominent in his works. His connection with the court brought him into the society of knights and nobles whose language he must have spoken and with whose culture he must have been acquainted. It is of little wonder that literature written for such readers, who were themselves familiar with French and Italian authors, as well as the classics, should abound in classical allusions and conventional settings despite the liveliness of the poet and the dramatic effectiveness of the tales. Interwoven among all his poems do we find these two threads.

The "Romaunt of the Rose", a translation from the French, is a formal treatment of the "love conventions", which were adopted not only by Chaucer in his original work but by the other authors of his age.

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[1] The most important of whom were Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio.

The Rose becomes the symbol of the beloved and receives the attentions of the lover who sighs, swoons, mourns his fate, and is encouraged by his confidant as the typical suitor of the time. It is unnecessary to point out the artificiality of a flower so represented. It has become mere allegory[1] for a fair lady and not the flower known to each of us. It is certainly not the garden rose of whom the poet speaks in the words of a plaintive lover, who is denied the favors of his mistress,

"I compleyned and sighed sore
And languished evermore
For I durst not over go
Unto the Rose I loved so."[2]

In the "Parlement of Foules" we find again an allegorical treatment of nature. The most generally accepted interpretation of the poem is that it was written in honor of the marriage of Anne of Bohemia and Richard II. It is Saint Valentine's day which is the occasion of a gathering of the birds to choose their mates. Nature presides over the meeting and assists in the selections. The "royal tercel" represents Richard, while the other birds symbolize suitors or the English Parliament.

---

1 "The Romaunt of the Rose" as allegory is treated more fully below.

2 "Romaunt of the Rose, L. 3485-3488.

The "Formel Egle" must be mated before those of lesser rank may do so. She refuses to agree. The final decision is to allow the "Formel Egle" to wait one year while the less important birds are given partners by Nature. Not only are the birds themselves symbolical of actual personages, but we also find that the conventional classification of the birds is employed:

> "That is to sey, the foules of Ravyne
> Were hyest set, and then foules smale
> That eaten as hem nature wolde enclyne,
> As worm, or thing of whiche I telle no tale;
> But water-foul sat lowest in the dale;
> And foul that liveth by seed on the grene,
> And that so fele, that womder was to sene."[1]

The characterizing remarks of Chaucer upon the numerous birds are not his own observations. He uses the formal characterizations which are extremely conventional rather than the least original. A few illustrations show us that many of these were not only in use in Chauser's times but are also familiar to the readers of today.

---

1 Parlement of Foules, l. 323-329.

"There was the douve, with hir eyen meke;
The jealous swan, ayens his deth that singeth;
The oule eek, that of dethe the bode
bringethe;
The crane the geaunt, with his trompes soune;
The thief, the chogh, and eek the jangling pye;
The scorning jay, the eles foo, the heroune;"[1]

Whenever a god or goddess is described, we find that Chaucer pictures him with conventional descriptions of nature. However varied and original such descriptions may seem it should be realized that this is because of the poet's freshness and liveliness of style and not because he is creating new surroundings. We are hardly surprised to hear of venus,

"Acitole in hir righte hand hadde she,
And on hir heed ful semely for to see,
A rose garland, fresh and well smellinge;
Above hir heed hir dowves flikeringe."[2]

Another painting on the walls of the "Theatre" which the noble Theseus had erected for the tournament, in which Palamon and Arcite were the chief adversaries, depicts the temple of Mars in the proverbial warlike atmosphere. As in the case of the other duties the portrayal of nature is drawn from classical allusions and not from Chaucer's own observations of nature. We find that the temple of Mars was surrounded by a forest,

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[1] Parlement of Foules L. 341-346

[2] The Knightes Tale, L. 1101-1104.

"In which there dwelleth neither man ne
beste,
With knotty knarry barevn trees olde
Of stubbes sharpe and hidous to biholde
In which ther ran a rumbel and a swough
As though a storm sholde bresten every bough."[1]

Even Chaucer's descriptions of the sun and of the May time, those two elements of nature in which he so delights, are somewhat artificial. The sun is often merely Phebus or "that Phebus the sonne with his goldene chariet bringeth forth the rosene day". May is most frequently described according to the conventions of the old romances. The birds sing, the sun shines, the breezes blow most gently, the meadow is filled with blooming flowers, and the lover goes forth to seek out his most beloved.

Classical terms. Just as Chaucer through his acquaintance with French and Italian literature became familiar with the names of Greek and Roman gods; so he learned the classical terms for the moon, sun, stars, winds. As has been mentioned above, Phebus is the name most frequently given to the sun. The moon becomes Lucina or Cynthia. Many of the constellations are known by their Latin appelations. We read of Venus, "olde colde Saturnus", Lucifer, "the dayes messengere", Castor, Pollux, Delphyn, "Atlantes daughtres sevene", Aucturus, Sirus and Cancer.

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[1] The Knightes Tale. l.1118-1122.

It is evident that the poet had more than a slight knowledge of these terms and of astronomy in general from the fact that he wrote the "Astrolabe" for his son Lewis which not only discussed the use of the instrument but also named numerous constellations and planets.

We find Zephirus mentioned as an aid to making the flowers bloom. Other winds are also given their classical names. How unfamiliar do those called Chorus, Borias, Eurus, and Auster seem to the reader of today! There are also references to Elicon, "the clere welle", and to Flora, the goddess of flowers.

An investigation, even as brief as the one which has been made in the previous pages, of Chaucer's use of classical terms will help us to realize that his treatment of nature was not always mere spontaneous enthusiasm. We begin to understand that many of his descriptions were the result of classical influences. Some were without any of the poet's liveliness of portrayal, while others were conventional in name alone, since much of the poet's originality and genius was added to the pictures.

Nature Personified as Goddesse. There is but one poem in which nature is spoken of as the "Goddesse Nature." In the "Parlement of Foules" we see her, "the viciare of th'almyghty lorde" dispensing favors to the assembled birds in her dominion:

-- "And in a launde, upon an hille of floures,
Was set this noble goddesse Nature;
. . . . . .
In swich aray men mighte hir ther finde.
This noble empresse, ful of grace,[1]

In other works we find this same idea that Nature is bounteous in her gifts to mankind. Although the title goddesse is not applied, we find several references to nature personified. This conception is one which is common to many poets. Chaucer does not even fall into the Wordsworthian mood of reflection endowing nature with the power of teaching mankind. He holds merely the conventional idea of nature who is the dispenser of gifts. This is best seen in the "Phisiciens Tale" when the poet describes the beauties of Virginia:

"For nature hath with sovereyn diligence
Y-formed hir in so greet excellence,
As though she wolde seyn, 'lo I Nature,
Thus can I forme and peynte a creature,
Whan that me list; who can me countrefete?
. . . . . .

---

[1] Parliment of Foules, L. 302-319.

For he that is the former principal
Hath maked me his vicaire general
To forme and Peynten ertheley creaturis
Right as me list, and ech thing in my
cure is
Under the mone, that may wane and waxe,
And for my werk right no-thing wol I axe;
My lord and I han of oon accord
I made hir to the worship of my lord.
So do I alle myne othere creatures
What colour that they han or what figures.'-
Thus semeth me that Nature wolde seye."[1]

B. Detailed Observations of Nature

That Chaucer was a man of the court is beyond question. Moreover, he was a Londoner. It is very probable that he lived for some time at Greenwich outside of the city. Nevertheless, London was his birth place and it was there that the poet spent the greater part of his life. We might wonder where he became so well acquainted with the world about him. Was it through his residence in the country? Was it through his travels to the continent on diplomatic missions or through his travels as a member of the committee for superintending the repairing of the banks of Thames between Woolwich and Greenwich? Was it through his work during his later life as Forester of North Petherton Park?

---

[1] Phisiciens Tale, L. 9-29.

If we but recall the London of the fifteenth century, we shall realize that it was not necessary to go beyond the city limits to come into close contact with nature. We find that London in the time of Henry II was a "city of gardens". One, Fitzstephen, tell us:

"On the north side of the city are fields for pastures, and a delightful plain of meadowland, interspersed with flowing streams, on which stand mills, whose clack is very pleasing to hear. Close by lies an immense forest in which are densely wooded thickets, the converts of game, stags, fallow-deer, boars, and wild bulls. The tillage lands of the city are not barren gravelly soil, but like the fertile plains of Asia which produce abundant crops and fill the barns of their cultivators. There are also round London, on the north sides in the suburbs, excellent springs, the water of which is clear, sweet, and salubrius, lapping the shore as they flow over the shining pebbles."[1]

It is little surprising to find a poet whom we know, through his characterization of man, to have been a keen observer, greatly interested in nature when surrounded by beauty of the outer world. How much of Chaucer's remarks are the result of his own study can not be easily determined. Many of his descriptions are so homely that only a master artist who knew his material could have drawn them. Even the most conventional of

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[1] Chaucer's England, by Mathew Browne, vol.ii p. 247

subjects are made more lively by the poet's often unconscious introduction of these observations so clearly his own. It is these little touches and often sly remarks which are important in bringing to the reader the realization that Chaucer was a man among us who enjoyed watching the "smale foules" or the humble "daysie" along the wayside as he travelled about the country on his many errands of importance.

That Chaucer was deeply interested in studying nature we are told in the poet's own words:

"On bokes for to rede I me delyte,
And to hem yene feyth and ful credence,
And in myn herte have hem in reverénce
So hertely, that ther is game none
That fra me bokes maketh me to goon
But hit be seldom, on the holy day;
Save certeynly, whan that the month of May
Is comen, and that I here the foules singe,
And that the floures ginnen for to springe,
Farwel my book and my devocioun".[1]

A few of the more important subjects of Chaucer's observations will be treated here. It is amazing to discover the number of birds, animals, flowers, and trees with which the poet was acquainted at least by name if not by actual knowledge. It is very evident to the reader that his knowledge of nature was not wholly superficial nor his attitude indifferent.

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[1] The Legend of Good Women, Version II, l. 30-39

Animals.[1] We find Chaucer treating two kinds of animals--those with which he is really acquainted and those which he knows through report alone or through his own reading. The former are usually described fully or are qualified with such remarks that we realize immediately it is an understanding picture which is being presented. The latter are dismissed with only conventional characterizations which are lacking in Chaucer's usual insight and appreciation. We find him saying of the tiger,

"Ther nas no tygre in the vale of Galgophye,
Whan that her whelp is stole whan it is lyte,
So cruel on the hunte, as is Arcite."[2]

In the same conventional manner is the lion treated. It was considered despite its apparent ferociousness to be kind. This was a result possibly of the reading of the bestiaries in which certain animals were supposed to have particular "natures". We find him describing the lion,

"For lo, the gentil kynd of the leoun!
For whan a flye offendeth him or byteth,
He with his tayl awey the flye smyteth,
Al esily; for, of his genterye,
Him deyneth not to wreke him on a flye,
As doth a curre or elles another beste."[3]

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[1] See appendix 1.

[2] The Knightes Tale, l. 1768-1770

[3] Legend of Good Women, L. 391-396

Of the more familiar beasts it is the smaller and most common ones in which the poet delights. Mice are often mentioned. Few of us will forget the Prioresse who is so very tender hearted that she would weep if she saw a mouse caught in a trap. We find mention of "Gibbe, the cat" and "Colle, the dog". Nor was that most lowly of animals, the "Reed sowe", neglected. But it is the small animals which win his greatest interest. He often tells us of the squirrels and rabbits which he must have watched darting among the trees or scurrying beneath the bushes. In his own words,

"And many squirelles, that sete
Ful hye upon the trees, and ete,
And in hir maner made festes."[1]

To me there is no picture which so clearly shows that Chaucer knew and appreciated animals as that of the little "hounde" in "The Book of the Duchesse". Whenever the passage is read it immediately calls forth in the mind the picture of a very nondescript dog who is eagerly trying to attract the dreamer's attention. The author's own description is much too good to be overlooked:-

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[1] Book of the Duchesse, L. 431-433

"And as I wente ther cam by me
A whelp, that fawned me as I stood.
That hadde y-folwed and koude no good.
Hit com and crepte to me as lowe
Right as hit hadde me y-knowe,
Heeld doun his heed and joyned his eres,
And leyde al smothe doun his heres.
I woulde have kaught hit, and anoon
Hit fledde, and was fro me goon;
And I him folwed, and hit forth wente."[1]

The variety of horses which are found in the "Prologue of "The Canterbury Tales" is a splendid example of Chaucer's originality of observation. Each pilgrim has a fitting mount. The knight and young "squyer" had fine horses and rode well. The ploughman rode upon a "mere" which we may well believe was a heavy, plodding blast. We learn of the poor clerk, however, that "As lene was his hors as is a rake".[2] Most interesting of all was the shipman's warn out hack for Chaucer tells us he "rood upon a rauncy".[3] A sailor could hardly be expected to choose a good horse and this the poet knew.

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1 Book of the Duchesse, l. 388-397

2 The Canterbury Tales, The Prologue, l. 287

3 Ibid l. 390

We realize from even such a brief view of the poet's use of animals in his works that many were intimately known to him. That he did not hold the Wordsworthian theory of treating only the most humble and most common things in nature, does not detract from his poetry. There is something of humor for us when we find Chaucer telling us of lions, tigers, serpents, or camels without the least compunction. What was not to be gained from actual experience could be found in books and Chaucer was a learned man of his day not loath to use such knowledge.

Birds.[1] Chaucer was widely acquainted with the names of birds. If mere numbers have any real importance, it is interesting to find that in reading his complete works one finds more species of birds mentioned than of any other element of nature. How many of these were merely drawn from his reading of books can not easily be determined. We have seen above that he was influenced by the "conventions". Neverless, from the many kinds of birds which are mentioned we can not but feel that Chaucer did have more than an ordinary knowledge of the "smale fowles". We find references to water fowl represented by "herounes", storks, swan, and "dokes"; to song birds represented by nightingales, larks, mavis, thrushes, to game birds represented by "qualyes", "patrichs", "haukes", "fesaunts", (the faucon was used for hunting);

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[1] See AppendixII

and to the more common birds represented by "sparrows", "swalows", jays, "oules", crows, and "ruddoks" or the "joly Robins" as he called them. There can be little doubt that the poet studied the many birds which he met as he rode on horseback through the green country lanes or which nestled in the trees possibly before his own study window.

If Chaucer was interested in watching the birds, he was far more influenced by their song. May day to him meant first of all, the singing birds. Their notes greeting him on a spring morning inspired the poet himself to song. It is interesting to consider two such descriptions. In both we find the author's power of vividness at its height. The first is found in his translation of the "Romaunt of the Rose":

"By note made faire servybe
These briddes that I you devise;
They songe her songe as faire and wele
As angels don espirtuel.
And, trusteth wel, whan I hem herde,
Ful lustily and wel I ferde,
For never yitt swich melodye
Was herd of man that myghte dye.
Swiche swete song was hem amonge,
That me thought it no briddis songe,
But it was wondir lyk to be
Song of mermaydens of the see,"[1]

---

[1] Romaunt of the Rose, l. 669-680

The second is from the poet's original work, "The Bookof the Duchesse":

" I looked forth, for I was waked
With smale foules a gret hepe,
That had affrayed me out of slepe
Through noyse and swetnese of hir song;
And, as me mette, they sate among,
Upon my chambre-roof withoute,
Upon the tyles, al a-boute,
And songen, everich in his wyse,
The moste solempne servyse
By note, that ever man, I trowe,
Had herd; for som of hom song lowe,
Som hye, and al of oon acorde.
To telle shortly, at oo worde,
Was never y-herd so swete a steven,
But hit had be a thing of heven;-
So mery a soun, so swete entunes,
That certes, for the toune of Twenes,
I nolde but I had herd hem since;
For al my chambre gan to ringe
Through singing of hir armonye.
For instrument nor melodye
Was nowher herd yet half so swete.
Nor of acorde half so mete;
For ther was of hem that feyned
To synge, for ech of hem him peyned
To find out mery crafty notes;
They ne spared not hir throtes."

1 Book of the Duchesse, l. 294-320

In the first quotation one is told of the beauty of the bird's song. It is compared to the voices of angels or of mermaids which "men clepen sereyns in Fraunce". These comparisons are conventional. They might have suggested themselves to one of us, were we to describe a similiar concert. It becomes Chaucer's own when he gives his feelings for the songs of the birds:

". . . . . whan I hem herde
Ful lustily and wel I ferde,"

It is the word "lustily" which above all makes us realize that Chaucer has entered into the spirit of May even in this translation, for he was a poet of wholesome good nature who was full of mirth and gayety. He appreciated the brightness of life despite his own difficulties and without overlooking the evils of the age which we find satirized in his works.

In the second selection we find the poet's power of description given full freedom. He seems to be filled with his love of the birds' songs. He helpd us to recall those spring mornings when we too have been awakened by the birds some of which "songe lowe som hye". That this was a much more soundful concert than is usually heard we are easily aware. When we compare this with the former quotation, we can readily discern how much more natural is the second description.

There are no conventional comparisons as those which were seen above. The birds are those to which Chaucer may have actually listened. Our delight is one of recognizing the familiar, expressed through the poet's genius of understanding and portraying the commonplace in life.

Nor was Chaucer above using the birds humorously. In that satire upon chivalry, the tale of "Sir Thopas", he says,

"The briddes singe, it is no nay,
The sparhauk and the papejay,
That joye it was to here;
The thrustelcok made eek his lay,
The wodedowne upon the spray
She sang ful loude and clere."[1]

The student of birds will realize that the song could not have been extremely beautiful as these birds can not sing at all. This is merely Chaucer's way of laughing at us with a twinkle in his eyes. We may conclude from this that the poet at least knew enough about birds to realize that these particular species of birds were not famed for their songs.

---

[1] Sir Thopas l. 55-60

In the "Parlement of Foules" which might be expected to contain a fuller treatment of birds than the other poems, we learn little about Chaucer's actual knowledge of bird lore. The birds are conventionally treated and are themselves ~~are~~ allegorical. The birds represent definite persons whom we can identify with certainty. The other poems in which birds are treated as the subject will be discussed in the following pages.

Flowers[1] To Chaucer the flowers were another element in making complete the beauties of spring. He often speaks of the single blossom but it is the garden or the meadow dotted with the many colored flowers of which he writes most frequently. Here it must also be realized that since the description of May was itself a convention of the poetry of the times, so too the single elements contained in the general picture must be considered as not entirely the result of the poet's own feelings. When one has examined several of the descriptions, it is discovered that the same colors are mentioned, "yelowe, whyte, and rede;" there is usually an abundance of green grass with a "clere wellw" nearby. So lacking in originality is it, that usually the same flowers are named if he goes as far as to designate them. A selection from his translation of the "Romaunt of the Rose" to which he is so greatly indebted in his later works will sufficiently illustrate his method of treatment.

1 See Appendix III.

"Through moisture of the welle wete
Sprang up the sote grene gras,
As fair, as thikke, as mister was.
But much amended it the place,
That th'erthe was of swich a grace
That it of floures had plente,
That both in somer and winter be.
Ther sprang the violet al newe,
And fresshe pervike, riche of hewe,
And floures yelowe, whyte, and rede;
Swich plentee grew ther never in mede.
Ful gay was al the ground, and queynt,
And poudred, as men had it peynt,
With many a fresh and soundry flour,
That casten up ful good savour."[1]

Another convention was that the clothing of the lover should be embroidered with flowers. Cupid in "The Romaunt of the Rose" appears dressed in flowers only, with a chaplet of roses on his head. The garland of flowers was also very customary. The "corones of roses and of lilie" which the angel in "The Seconde Nonnes Tale" was a development of this same idea.

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[1] Romaunt of the Rose, L. 1424-1438.

Chaucer's description of the single flower is not very convincing in most cases. Certainly the rose in "The Romaunt of the Rose" is no longer a simple flower. It is an allegorical representation and as such can not be expected to be treated as the flower of actuality. We do, however, find the description of one flower which makes us believe that Chaucer really did care for it:

"Now have I than swich a condicioun,
That, of alle the floures in the mede,
Than love I most these floures whyte and
rede,
Swiche as men callen daysies in our toun." [1]

In the prologue of the "Legend of Good Women" he goes on to tell us of her beauties and goodness, of his worship for her and of his dream in which she is called the flower of the god of love. It is hard to distinquish between the poet's real emotions in this poem and his use of conventions as the daisy becomes the object of his love like the rose in the earlier poem. Moreover, the daisy is finally called the flower of the "good Alceste".

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[1] The Legend of Good Women, Prologue, Second version, L. 40-43

In considering Chaucer's use of flowers in general we are convinced that he was more influenced by convention than by his own observations of nature. It is found that fewer species of flowers are named by the poet than of either animals or birds. These names[1] show no evidence of the author's having had great familiarity with nature. They are such as might be gained by a superficial reading of poetry.

Trees.[2] When we examine the number of trees which Chaucer includes throughout his works we are at first amazed at the extent of his knowledge. This amazement, however, becomes somewhat less when it is realized that here, too, the poet is directly influenced by his study of the classics.[3] We find lists of trees which may be compared to the catalogues of the epic, in the "Romaunt of the Rose", "The Parlement of Foules", and "The Knightes Tale". That of the "Parlement of the Foules" is typical:

"For over-al, wher that I myn eyen caste,
Were trees clad with leves that ay shal laste,
Eche in his kinde, of colour fresh and grene
As emeraude, that joye was to sene.

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1 See Appendix III

2 See Appendix I4

3 Interpretation of Nature from Beowulf to Shakespeare, by F. W. Moorman, P. 112

The bilder ook, and eek the hardy asshe;
The piler elm, the cofre unto careyne;
The bostree piper; holm to whippes lasshe;
The sayling firr; the cipres, deth to
pleyne;
The sheter ew, the asp for shaftes pleyne;
The olyve of pees, and eek the drunken
vyne,
The victor palm the laurer to devyne."[1]

How lacking such an enumeration is in the poet's usual liveliness of characterization we see from the description of the most graceful of trees, the elm, as "the piler elm, the cofre unto careyne".

If Chaucer was ignorant of the various species of trees about which he had read or had been told, often grouping those which are native of one country with those which are common in another, he did appreciate a grove with the trees so arranged as to form a perfect canopy above one's head. Such descriptions were also found in the other conventional writers, however, and are not original with him. He did not delight in the beauties of irregularity as does the landscape artist of today. Beauty was found for him in the formally planned garden or wooded slope as it was for the nature lover of the early eighteenth century. To him the grim,

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[1] Parlement of Foules, L. 172-182.

uncultivated forest inspired terror not joy; he tells of the forest of Mars painted on the wall of the "theatre" in the "Knightes Tale" in which were,

" Knotty knarry bareyn trees olde
Of stubbes sharpe and hidous to biholde;"[1]

This attitude was the prevalent one of the times. We see, however, the grove which met with his approval in the following picture. The trees are arranged in a certain order to give shade to the shy deer or the frisking squirrel:

"Hit is no need eek for to axe
Wher ther were many grene greves,
Or thikke of trees, so ful of leves;
And every treee stood by him-selve
For other wel ten foot or twelve.
So grete trees, so huge of strenghte,
Of fourty or fifty fadme lenghte,
Clene withoute bough or stikke,
With croppes brode, and eek as thikke--
They were nat an inche a-sonder--
That hit was shadwe over-al under;
And many an hert and many an hinde
Was both before me and bihinde."[2]

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[1] See note page. 10.

[2] Book of the Duchesse, L. 416-428.

It has been shown that Chaucer's descriptions of trees emphasize the utilitarian viewpoint.[1] They were to be used as masts of ships, as coffins, as bows, or, when growing, for the purpose of shade. How different is this attitude from that of more modern poets of whom Joyce Kilmer in his "Trees" is a representative

It may be concluded from this brief examination that the poet's use of trees iS greatly influenced by the courtly group. Much has been taken from the classics or later French and Italian writers. We find the classifications used very similiar to those of the earlier poets. The liking of the formal, well-ordered grove was also apparent in their work. There are very few observations original with the poet concerning trees. One passage, however, shows greater insight than any of the others. Whoever has witnessed the felling of a tree can not but appreciate Chaucer's description,

"Thenk here-ayeins, whan that the sturdy
ook,
On which men hakketh ofte, for the nones,
Receyved hath the happy falling strook,
The grete sweigh doth it come al at ones,
As doon these rokkes or these milne-stones."[2]

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[1] Interpretation of Nature in English Poetry from Beowulf to Shakespeare, p. 112.

[2] Troilus and Criseyde, Book II, L. 1580-1584.

Fish.[1] Chaucer does not use descriptions of fish very frequently in his poems. We find mention of pike, eels, and salmon. He tells us also of "Jonas in the fisshes mawe". A short list of fish is given in "The Romaunt of the Rose". This was of course taken from the original and was not the result of his own knowledge or investigation. There are a few passages, however, which are not mere references to names or to well-known stories. The comparison of Love to a fisher would seem to indicate at least a slight acquaintance with the sport;

"Hit semeth he hath to lovers enmite,
And lyk a fissher, as men alday may see,
Baiteth his angle-hook with som plesaunce,
Til mony a fish is wood til that he be
Sesed ther-with; and then at erst hath he
Al his desyr, and ther-with al mischaunce;
And thogh the lyne breke, he hath penaunce;
For with the hoke he wounded is so sore,
That he his wages hath for ever-more."[2]

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[1] See Appendix V.

[2] The Complyent of Mars, L. 236-243.

Although his treatment of this element of nature is not extensive, we may infer it is the consequence of his own interest and not the influence of the conventional writing of the time. There is not extreme originality nor a complete breaking away from the courtly writing, yet we find here some evidence that Chaucer was able, whenever he wished, to introduce new elements which were not wholly conventional.

III

Methods of Treating Nature.

A. Descriptive.

Chaucer was interested in nature only as an objective study. We find him nowhere projecting his own emotions through his treatment of nature. He is not like Wordsworth who holds nature as the great teacher. Nor was he akin to the poet Shelley who becomes almost identified with the cloud itself in his immortal poem. Never does this poet of the fourteenth century become so closely allied to the natural world. He is ever on the out side looking on. He may love the beauties of the world which surround him and appreciate the charm of the birds, trees, sun, and water, but he never uses them to express his inner feelings. He is ever the observer, the describer. His descriptions were not without the influence of outside forces. Many were used merely because they were the accepted convention of writers of that day. Chaucer is, in fact, considered the chief representative of the Medieval group of courtly poets whose treatment of poetry was essentially that of the painter rather than that of the lyricist.

Landscape. The creating of pictures of the natural world was one of Chaucer's greatest descriptive powers. Landscape is here meant to include the land, sea, mountains, sky and air. Chaucer's chief delight was in the Maytime when all was bright and full of animation. These descriptions which are found so frequently in the poet's works have great similarity. It is necessary to realize that these scenes were, despite the author's own originality, based upon the works of French and Italian poets who had in turn adopted the convention from the Latin poetry of the Augustan and post-Augustan period and from the Greek poetry of the Hellenistic period.[1] It is interesting to examine the typical description of these earlier poets. The time is usually the dawn of a May morning. The poet or hero is in a garden or grove shaded with lofty trees in which the squirrels frisk about. A gentle stream winds in and out watering the fresh green grass which is dotted with flowers of many colors. Deer, rabbits, and other such animals appear here and there among the trees. To complete the picture we find a chorus of birds which sing most beautifully while soft breezes from the south or west gently stir the leaves.

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1 Interpretation of Nature in English Poetry from Beowulf to Shakespeare, by F. W. Moorman, P. 108.

That Chaucer's descriptions were not entirely the result of the influence of this courtly group of writers we may well believe. He genuinely loved the spring. It is in April when the Canterbury pilgrims start upon their travels. His own love of this season is frankly told in "The Legend of Good Women". The dream in the "Book of the Duchesse" is of May. Moreover, the only other season which met his approval was that of Saint Valentine's day when the birds choose their mates as he shows in the "Parlement of Foules". "The Compleynt of Mars" is sung by a bird upon this day. We also find that "Troilus and Criseyde" takes place in April and May.

After telling us of the songs of the birds, he tells us of the greenwood where he wanders in his dream of May, in the "Book of the Duchesse". It is only by reading one of his own descriptions that we can realize that Chaucer by his following of conventions has not become dull or lost any of his ability to paint landscapes beautifully:

". . . . . and hit forth wente
Doun by a floury grene wente
Ful thikke of gras, ful softe and swete,
With floures fele, faire under fete,
And litel used, hit seemed thus;
For bothe Flora and Zephirus,
They two that make floures growe,
Had mad hir dwelling ther, I trowe;
For hit was, on to beholde,
As thogh the erthe envye wolde
To have mo floures, swiche seven
As in the welken sterres be.
Hit had forgete the povertee
That winter, through his colde morwes,
Had mad hit suffre(n), and his sorwes;
Al was forgeten, and that was sene.
For al the wode was waxen grene,
Swetnesse of dewe had mad it waxe."[1]

A passage which creates the atmosphere of spring most realistically and shows that the poet had a greater depth of appreciation and understanding of springtime than could be gained from the reading of books is found in the prologue of the "Canterbury Tales". One who has watched the approach of spring over the countryside can realize the truth of his description:

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[1] The Book of the Duchesse, L. 397-415.

"When that Aprille with his shoures sote
The droghte of Marche hath perced to
the rote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre cropped, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne,
And smale fowles maken melodye,
That slepen al the night with open ye.
(So priketh hem nature in hir corages);
Than longen fold to goon on pilgrimages".[1]

We also find the joy in the summer season when the disagreeable winter has passed, in the animated songs of the birds:

"Now welcome somer, with thy sonne softe,
That hast this wintres weders over-shake,
And driven awey the longe nightes blake!
Seynt Valentyn, that art ful hy on lofte;--
Thus singen smale foules for they sake--
'Now welcom somer, with thy sonne softe,
That hast this wintres weders overshake."[1]

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[1] The Canterbury Tales, Prologue, L. 1-12.

[2] Parlement of Foules, L. 679-686.

It was the springtime of "grene grass", the flowery "mede", "brighte Phebus", soft, murmuring streams, gentle breezes, and singing birds in which Chaucer displays his descriptive powers most fully. He loves brightness and cheer and he colors his poetry most vividly with the portrayal of the joyousness of May and the summer season.

Garden scenes are, likewise, often pictured in Chaucer's works. These gardens are not wild or uncultivated. They are the formal gardens which would be found in the estates of the nobility. They are nature but nature restrained by art. These gardens are never far from dwellings, but are conventional like the groves which have been discussed above. We find a description of Criseyde's garden,

"This yerd was large, and rayled-alle
the aleyes,
And shadwed wel with blosomy bowes grene,
And benched newe, and sounded alle the
weyes,
In which she walketh arm in arm bitwene;"[1]

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[1] Troilus and Criseyde, Book II, L. 819-822.

The fair Emelye is also discovered by Palamoun and Arcite as she wanders in the garden gathering flowers on a fresh May morning. It is evidently a very usual back ground for the beautiful heroine. The garden of the "Romaunt of the Rose" is typical of the writing of the courtly group. It became as did the poem itself a model for the later writers. There are birds, flowers, trees, green grass and a "clere welle". The garden is filled with courtly personages, fair ladies, and handsomely garbed men as Sir Mirhte, or Swete-loking. We find, therefore, in Chaucer's use of the garden little that is new or original.

Second only to his love of the springtime was Chaucer's delight in the sun. We have observed above that his use of classical terms was most extensive. We read of Phebus continually and yet we do not feel that the poet is presenting merely conventionalized pictures of the dawn. He has infused the descriptions with a personal animation and cheer. How far from the usual classical protrayal of the sunrise are these often quoted lines:

" The bisy larke, messager of day,
Salueth in hir song the morwe gray;
And fyry Phebus ryseth up so brighte,
That al the orient laugheth of the lighte,
And with his stremes dryeth in the greves
The silver dropes, hanging on the leves." [1]

We find the conventional groves, the Orient, and the classic Phebus, all these are common enough in the poetry of that age. It is the genius of Chaucer which has, through his own spirit of gayety, added the one element to make this a living, glowing description.

Many references to the sun are found throughout his works. We read of "the sonne, the candel of jelosye", "the brighte Phebus", "Phebus with his fyry torches rede" or that "the dowening up-rist out of the see". He never slights an opportunity for placing the sun before us. His use of it seems to add a brightness to his landscapes. We must realize, however, that all his descriptions were not saved from the triteness of repeated use by his individuality of expression. An example of his failure to introduce originality into his verse is found in the following lines:

---

[1] The Knightes Tales, L. 1491-1496.

"The laurer-crouned Phebus, with his hete,
Gan, in his course ay upward as he wente,
To warmen of th'est see the waves wete;"[1]

Why Chaucer had this strong love of the sun may be explained in several ways. In his times there were not the many artificial methods of lighting. Candles were used to supply illumination in the evenings. These were costly and, judged from the standpoint of today, very ineffective. It was for this reason that there was the custom of early rising, as the daylight, precious as it was, could not be wasted. The worshipping of the sun by our ancestors in the earlier days still had some influence, as it does even in the present generation although we may little realize it. It has also been suggested that Chaucer's interest in the science of astronomy, as evidenced by "The Astrolabe", was another cause of his enthusiasm for the sun.[2]

Although his attitude toward night was one of dislike if not of dread, we know that he studied the stars and that he appreciated the beauty of the moon from the frequent mentions of the planets which were discussed above and his allusions to "Lucina the shene". None of these descriptions are, however, as full of animation as his pictures of the sun. One of the twilight is, however, so effective that it should not be overlooked:

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[1] Troilus and Criseyde, Book V, L. 1107-9

[2] Interpretation of Nature in English Poetry from Beowulf to Shakespeare, by T. W. Moorman p. 113.

" The dayes honour, and the hevenesye,
The nightes fo, al this clepe I the sonne,
Gan western faste, and dounward for to
wrye,
As he that hadde his dayes cours y-ronne;
And whyte thinges wexen dimme and donne
For lak of light, and sterres for to appere,"[1]

Color. To Chaucer the colors of a scene must have been most impressive. It is his use of color which gives his pictures so much of beauty for the reader. We accept this fact unconsciously, but upon a close examination its importance becomes more apparent. We read of the "grene May" the "floures whyte, blewe, yelowe, and rede", of the small fish with "finnes rede and scales silver-brighte", of the "lilie upon his stalke grene", the golden-tressed Phebus, "wawes grene", and numerous others which become evident as soon as we are intent upon observing them.

His masterpiece in color might be called his description of the unfortunate Chauntecleer:

---

[1] Troilus and Cryseyde, Book II, L. 904-909.

"His comb was redder than the fyn coral.
And batailled as it were a castel wal;
His byle was blak, and as the jeet it shoon;
Lyk asure were his legges and his toon;
His nayles whiter than the lylye flour,
And lyk the burned gold was his colour."[1]

The picture of his adversary is also notable for the same element:

"His colour was bitwixe yelow and reed,
And tipped was his tayl. And bothe his eeris,
With blak, unlyk the remenant of his heres;
His snowte smal, with glowinge eyen tweye."[2]

This keeness of perception in the poet makes his descriptions much more vivid. It is these finer touches which constitute the genius of Chaucer. We hardly realize how much would be lacking in his verse were these details omitted.

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1 Nonne Prestes Tale, L. 39-44.
2 Nonne Preestes Tale, L. 82-85.

Cheerfulness. It would hardly be fitting to pass over Chaucer's descriptive treatment of nature without mentioning the atmosphere of cheer which the poet has created in his poetry. We find throughout his works a certain lightness and brightness. We have already mentioned his love of the sun. The dark and gloomy did not serve this poet as subjects for lenghty reflections. They were, rather, distasteful to him. He tells us of a "mery someres day" and that at sunrise" al the orient laugheth of the lighte". Surely such expressions of pure joy can fill the reader with nothing but a sense of happiness or at least pleasantness when he reads the poems.

The picture of Maytime itself is one which would give lightness and charm to any work. When this is combined with Chaucer' animated and humorous style, the result is irresistible. The beauty of the surroundings, the song of the birds, and the sound of the gently flowing stream are all elements in producing this air of cheerfulness throughout his poetry. To more than note briefly this element of this poet's descriptions would be superfluous as it is so very obvious to every student of Chaucer. One cannot read his poems without realizing immediately that his own feelings of animation and good humor become a part of the pictures which the poet gives us.

English Elements. However much indebted Chaucer might be to classical and conventional influences, it must be admitted that many of his descriptions of nature were essentially English. The reader of the "Canterbury Tales" realizes how true to life his portraits of the English characters were. His descriptions of spring must have been the counter part of those which he experienced either in London or on his travels into the country. The beauties of England have been attested to in recent years by Robert Browning in his "Home-Thoughts, From Abroad".

A most native element is the use of hunting scenes in his poems. We find a group of hunters in the "Book of the Duchesse". It is certainly one well acquainted with the sport who gives us such a picture:

"Whan we came to the forest-syde,
Every man dide, right anoon,
As to hunting fil to doon.
The mayster-hunte anoon, fot-hoot,
With a gret horne blew three moot

At the uncoupling of his houndes.
Within a whyl the hert(y)--founde is,
Y-halowed, and rechased faste
Longe tyme; and at the laste,
Fro alle the houndes a prevy way.

The houndes had overshote hem alle,
And were on a defaute y-falle;
Therwith the hunte wonder faste
Blew a forloyn at the laste."[1]

We discover that Dido could hunt in the English fashion. The monk in the "Canterbury Tales" was famed for his horses and men might hear his bridle as he rode along "ginglen in a whistling wind". Sir Thopas was also a hunter. We find that King Theseus of "The Knightes Tale" was also a lover of this sport. Strangely enough, it is the English form of hunting which he practices and not the Greek. He becomes so eager,

"That in his bed ther daweth him no day,
That he nis clad, and redy for to ryde
With hunte and horn, and houndes him
bysyde."[2]

Nor is this the only English touch which can be found in Chaucer's treatment of nature. In the "Nonne Prestes Tale" Is a most realistic picture of the farmyard animals. These the poet must have seen often and perhaps just such a picture was witnessed by him:

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1 Book of the Duchesse, L. 372-386.

2 The Knightes Tale, L. 818-820

"Ran Colle our dogge, and Talbot, and
Gerland,
And Malkin, with a distaf in hir hand;
Ran cow and calf, and eek the verray
hogges
So were they fered for berking of the
dogges
And shouting of the men and wimmen
eke,
They ronne so, hem thoughte hir herte
breke,
They yelleden as feendes doon in helle;
The dokes cryden as men wolde hem
quelle;
The gees for fere flowen over the trees;
Out of the hyve cam the swarm of bees;
So hidous was the noyse, a ! benedicte![1]

For such descriptions we realize that Chaucer was far from insensible to the natural objects which were about him. So much there is of native English atmosphere that in truth, we feel is the more important factor. Nothing could be more homely or more exactly portrayed than the whole poem about the experiences of Chauntecleer as he who has ever been a farmer will immediately recognize.

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[1] The Nonne Preestes Tale, L. 563-574.

Figures of speech. One of the most effective means of creating vividness in his works is Chaucer's use of well turned figures of speech. We find these continually in his works. There are many humorous similes. Palamoun compares Troilus to the ass,

"Or artow lyk an asse to the harpe,
That hereth soun, whan men the strenges plye,
But in his minde of that no melodye
May sinken, him to glade, for that he
So dul is of his bestialitte?"[1]

There are many other similes which might be quoted such as the good "wyf" who was "as jolif as a pye" or the pardoner who, "a voys hadde he as smale as hath a goot". These brief almost terse comparisons seem to remain in the memory after the longer descriptions have vanished. It is one of the evidences of Chaucer's genius what he is able to sketch in so few words by the use of various figures of speech pictures which remain with us forever.

It must also be pointed out that many of his similes are very beautiful such as that of the sad Criseyde:

"Therwith the teres from hir even two
Doun fille, as shour in Aperill, ful swythe;"[2]

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[1] Troilus and Criseyde, L. 731-735.

[2] Troilus and Criseyde, L. 750-751. Book IV.

We are shown, however, that even his use of similes is not entirely original. Mr. Mackail points out one simile which is typically Dantesque:[1]

"But right as floures, thorough the
colde of night
Y-closed, stoupen on hir stalkes lowe,
Redressen hem a-yein the sonne bright,
And spreden on hir kinde cours by
rowe;
Right so gan tho his even up to throwe
This Troilus,". . . . . [2]

The same critic gives us an illustration of a fully elaborated epic simile,

"Right as the hunter in the regne of
Trace,
That stondeth at the gappe with a spere,
Whan hunted is the leoun or the bere," [3]

The most frequently expressed metaphor which we find in Chaucer's works is that of the comparison of a person to a flower as the Virgin Mary who is called "of alle floures flour", and "fresshe flour" or Pity which is the "benigne flour" or "Womanly Noblesse" addressed as "flour of Wommanhede". We are not surprised to discover this rather trite figure of speech.

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[1] The Springs of Helicon, by John W. Mackail p. 143.

[2] Troilus and Criseyde, Book II, L. 967-972.

[3] Knightes Tales, L. 780-782.

It must have been much in use among the courtly or chivalric writers whom we know influenced Chaucer to a greater extent in his earlier period of writing. There are, however, other more vigorous uses of the metaphor as "the sonne, the candel of jelosye", "the sea of love", and the "tempest of despair". None of these are the result of great originality.

It maybe concluded that in his use of similes the poet does present some most vivid and lasting pictures. Nevertheless, there is much that is conventional. His metaphors we discover, employ less of individuality and personal understanding of nature.

B. As subject of Certain Poems.

Allegories. It is unnecessary to inform the student of Chaucer that his most important allegory is the "Romaunt of the Rose" which he translated from the French and which came to have such a strong influence upon the thought and literature of his age. The Rose becomes the central figure around which is carried on the conventions of the court of love. The other figures are themselves allegorical. The garden with its green grass, singing birds, canopy of trees, and clear springs became the accepted setting of the love poems for many years.

His treatment of nature in this work is most conventional. The Rose, though beautiful, is not true to life, as it represents a beautiful woman who is sought by an ardent lover according to the laws of the court of love. The surroundings themselves are idyllic and not those of the world. We realize that Chaucer is here translating the work of other writers, and in spite of his own original comments, the poem cannot be the result of personal observations.

"The Parlement of Foules" in contrast to the "Romaunt of the Rose" is Chaucer's own work. Much material has been borrowed, but the poem as a whole has no definite source. There have been many discussions as to whether this is an allegorical poem.[1] The most generally accepted interpretation is that the "formel" represents Anne of Bohemia, the "royal tercel" represents King Richard II and the other contestants are earlier suitors of Anne.[1] Whatever the interpretation may be, the picture of birds is extremely amusing. Human characteristics have become intermingled with the characteristics of birds. The less important birds (the classification has been mentioned above) are much as we should expect to find them.

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[1] A Chaucer Hand book, by Robert D. French, p. 92ff.

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We discover Chaucer making few original observations, however. In the assembly over which Nature presides there are many noises and disagreements. We could readily imagine that a group of birds would create just such commotion. It is in the contest for the "formel" that we lose the feeling that here is a scene from nature accurately portrayed. These birds acquire the characteristics of persons. They are no longer merely common "foules".

In this allegory, if we may speak of it as such, Chaucer has given us a much more lifelike portrait of nature although it is conventionally treated to a great extent. The veil of allegory is not so transparent here. The birds seem so real to some students that they have denied the poem is an allegory at all.

We find that Chaucer did not make an extensive use of natural objects as the subject of allegory. In his own work it has been noted that nature is treated much more realistically than is the case of his translation of "The Romaunt of the Rose".

Nature Fables. The best known of Chaucer's nature fables is that of the "Nonne Preestes Tale". It began as a fable to point a moral. It finally became a part of the beast epic built around Reynard the Fox. Other versions are to be found in French and German.[1] The story itself is not original, that of the sly fox who entices the cock away and then attacks him. It is the local color, the dialogue between Chauntecleer and Pertelote, and the Lamentations which show the originality of the poet's genius. The truth in the portrayal of the English scenery we have mentioned above. In the conversation between the cock and his beloved we have a long discussion of the question as to whether dreams really portend events which are to come. Chauntecleer cites many instances in which disaster has followed the ignoring of warning dreams. The charms of the fair tempter, however, prove too much and he gives in to her arguments. Despite the learning which is exhibited by the two fowls we are never allowed to forget their identity through Chaucer's use of the mock-epic.

His pictures of the hens are always most realistic. Whoever has watched a flock of poultry would appreciate the description,

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[1] A Chaucer Handbook, by Robert D. French p. 257.

"For it was day, and eek his hennes alle;
And with a chuk he gan hem for to calle,
Fro he had founde a corn, lay in the
verd."[1]

This poem although greatly influenced by his knowledge of classics and of other earlier writers is more clearly the result of Chaucer's own observations. We feel that the moral of the story is not the poet's chief interest. It is the characterizations which receive his greatest attention. The work can not be spoken of too highly as showing his genius for creating vivid personalities even if these are only animals or fowl.

The "Squieres Tale" is merely fragmentary and the story of the mourning falcon in which we are interested is but a part of what has been written. The beautiful Canacee has been given a ring through whose power she is able to understand and talk with the birds. The falcon is not able to tell the whole of her story; so we are left unsatisfied. The treatment of the bird is mainly conventional. We do not feel that it is realistically described. She appears more as an actual person than a bird.

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[1] Nonne Preestes, L. 353-356.

The "Maunciples Tale" is another nature fable. It is the story of a white crow who betrays the infidelity of his master's wife. As a result the crow's feathers are plucked out and he is sentenced to loss of his power of song and speech. It should be noted that the master is Phebus and is given the classical characterizations. This poem is probably of Oriental origin. In it there are few observations of nature which were Chaucer's own. The vividness of the tale is not from the treatment of nature but from the situations which occur.

IV

Chaucer's Philosophy of Nature.

A. Attitude.

Toward the more pleasant features of Nature.

As we have said, it is the atmosphere of lightness and cheer with which the poetry of Chaucer abounds. We can not read his works without realizing that it was these pleasanter features of nature in which the poet was most interested. His very zest in describing these elements reveals immediately the poet's sympathy for them. His portrayal of joyousness and beauty in the natural world brings before us Chaucer's genius in its fullest power of vividness and liveliness.

It has been said that Chaucer, like the French trouveres, "has a lightness of heart which is not tumultuous but diffused. It is born of his pleasure in life and is revealed by his taste for the well-lit pictures which call up spring, the month of May, flowers, birds, and music. One line in which he resumes the youth of his squire might be the device of all his poetry.

'He was as fressh as is the moneth of May.'"[1]

There are countless illustrations of then poet's delight in the more cheerful side of nature. We realize much of this attitude was gained through his translation of the work of Guillaume de Lorris, but we must accept his sincerity in such passages as the following:

"That fresshe floures, blewe, and whyte,
and rede,
Ben quike agayn, that winter dede made,
And ful of bawme is fletinge every mede;
Whan Phebus doth his brighte bemes
sprede
Right in the whyte Bole, it so bitidde
As I shal singe, on Mayes day the thridde,"[2]

We may conclude from our survey of the subject that Chaucer's attitude toward the pleasanter elements of nature was one of delight. He never allowed an opportunity to escape in which he might describe the beauties of May, with the brilliant sunshine, the singing birds, the many colored flowers and the playful little animals.

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1 History of English Literature, vol. I, p. 85 by Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian

2 Troilus and Criseyde, Book II, l. 50-56.

Toward the harsher features of Nature.

The poet who glories in the tempest at sea or the winter's storm is not akin to Chaucer. We find him either avoiding the sterner forces of nature in his descriptions or portraying them in such a manner that only the roughness and unpleasantness are apparent. He sees no beauty in a raging blizzard and we perceive immediately that there is no delight in these descriptions. He is merely trying to instill the feeling of terror in his readers. Even the ocean itself is no inspiration to him; it is merely the "wilde see" or the "salte see". The rocks along the coast of Brittany stir no feeling of pleasure in him:

" 'Eterne god that thrugh thy purveyaunce
Ledest the world by certain governaunce,
In ydel, as men seyn, ye no-thing make;
But, lord, thise grisly feendly rokkes blake,
That semen rather a foul confusioun
Of werk than any fair creacioun
Of swich a parfit wys god and a stable,
Why han ye wroght this werk unresonable?" [1]

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[1] The Frankeleyns Tale, L, 137-144.

The winter season gives him no pleasure. Storms also terrify him as we see from a passage in the "House of Fame" in which the noise is being described:

"And what soun is it lyk?' quod he.
'Peter! lyk beting of the see!
Quod I, again the roches holowe,
Whan tempest doth the shippes swalowe;
And lat a man stonde, out of doute,
A myle thens, and here hit route;
Or elles lyk the last humblinge
After the clappe of a thundringe,
When Joves hath the air y-bete;
But hit doth me for fere swete'" [1]

It is the harsher elements of nature to which he pays little attention or at best presents in a most unfavorable light. We may infer from his description that his attitude was one of dislike. He has a lack of appreciation for the unpleasantness or even the irregularity of nature.

This lack of understanding of the harsher features of nature may be attributed, in part, to the unpleasantness of the winter season in England when there were no adequate means of lighting or heating during the dark cold months. Travel upon the water was also very different from that of today. There were no large steamers, and sea voyages were most uncomfortable as well as dangerous. The rocky promontories were also to be feared as no beacon light warned the ship of its peril.

1 House of Fame Book II, L. 525-534.

B. The Law of Kind.

An idea which we find recurring very often in Chaucer's works is that of the "law of kind". Every animal has a certain "nature" which is instinctive to it and can not be changed through any effort. We have mentioned above the supposed gentleness of the lion. The monkey was a "coward ape", while the she-wolf is of a "vileins kinde". Chaucer tells us in the "Maunciples Tale" that we can not change what "nature hath naturelly set in a creature". He gives us several illustrations of this law. One of the most amusing is the picture of the pampered cat who sees a mouse:

"Lat take a cat, and fostre him wel with
milk,
And tendre flesh, and make his couche
of silk,
And lat him seen a mous go by the wal;
Anon he weyveth milk, and flesh, and al,
And every deyntee that is in that hous,
Swich appetyt hath he to ete a-mous.
Lo, here hath lust his dominacioun,
And appetyt flemeth discrecioun."[1]

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[1] The Maunciples Tale. L. 71-78

We find this idea repeated again in the "Squires Tale" when he tells us that all things repair to their own nature. He gives us the example of the caged bird:

"For though thou night and day take of
Hem hede,
And strawe hir cage faire and softe as
silk,
And yeve hem sugre, hony, breed and milk.
Yet anon, as that his dore is uppe,
He with his feet wol spurne adoun his
cuppe,
And to the wode he wol and wormes ete;
So newefangel been they fo hir mete,
And loven novelryes of propre kinde;
No gentillesse of blood (ne) may hem
binde."[1]

Although this idea of the "law of kind" is prevalent in the literature of Chaucer's age, it is apparent from his frequent repetitions that it was a sincere belief with him. An examination of his works with this topic in mind results in a collection of most interesting as well as amusing illustrations of the "law of kind" as it appears in many species of animals.

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[1] The Squieres Tale, L. 602-612.

V

Conclusions.

From this study of nature in Chaucer's works we may conclude:

A. That Chaucer did have a strong love of nature as he tells us himself.

B. That his work was greatly influenced by the conventions of the age as found especially in the "Romaunt of the Rose".

C. That Chaucer's treatment of nature was objective and descriptive rather than subjective and reflective.

D. That his attitude toward the dark and stronger elements of nature was that of dislike as is seen from his unsympathetic treatment of winter, storms, and the seas.

E. Conversely, that his poetry is filled with color, brightness, and sunshine. These qualities are observed most particularly in his descriptions of Maytime and the dawn.

F. That Chaucer regarded nature as the giver of gifts.

G. That he sincerely believed each animal had a certain "nature" which was native to it and could not be changed as is made evident by the "Law of Kind".

APPENDIX

I Kinds of Animals mentioned in Chaucer's works.

Bear	Kid
Bole	Lamb
Buck	Leopard
Calf	Leoun
Camaille	Lynx
Cat	Mouse
Cow	Olifaunt
Deer	Ram
Doe	Rat
Dog	Roe
Fawn	Sow
Fox	Spaniel
Goot	Squirrel
Grav Hound	Tiger
Horse	Wolf

II Kinds of Birds mentioned in Chaucer's Works.

Alpes	Owl
Buzzard	Partridge
Chough	Peacock
Cok	Phesant
Crane	Popinjay
Crow	Pye
Cukkow	Quail
Dove	Raven
Eagle	Ruddok

Falcon
Feldefare
Finch
Groshawk
Hawk
Heron
Jay
Kyte
Lapwing
Lark
Mavis
Merlin
Nightingale
Skylark
Sparrow
Stare
Stork
Swallow
Savon
Tarey
Thrustel
Titmouse
Turtledove
Wodewale
Sparhawk

* *

III Kinds of Flowers mentioned in Chaucer's Works.

Columbyn
Daisy
Fleur de lys
Lily
Periwinkle
Plantain
Primrose
Rose
Violet

IV Kinds of Trees mentioned in Chaucer's Works.

Alder	Licorice
Almond	Ligne Aloe
Apple	Lime
Ash	Maple
Aspin	Nutmeg
Beech	Oak
Birch	Olive
Box	Palm
Cetewale	Peach
Chestnut	Perejonette
Cypress	Pine
Date	Plane
Elm	Plum
Fig	Pomegrante
Fir	Poplar
Hawthorn	Quince
Hazel	Spice
Laurel	Thorn
Yew	

V Kinds of Fish mentioned in Chaucer's Works.

Eel	Pyk
Houndfish	Salmon

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Note: Numerous other books have been read and examined but were found to have no bearing upon the subject under discussion.

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